

L'HÔPITAL

BY

ROBERT DE BALSAC

TRANSLATED BY MICHEL PIJOAN

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The short treatise, essentially entitled "L'Hôpital" and the inmates which it contained, was written by Robert de Balsac, *circa* 1485. The strange and rather clever twists of thought provoke a suspicious mind to connect it in some manner or other with the 'Notae Variorum' of Dr. Francis Rabelais: In searching for the truthful state of the turbid, inconstant and unsettled mind which deviates from the ordinary everyday balanced living, Balsac gives the 'Grundsubstanz' for Rabelais' famous literary "Prognostication Pantagruellion," the first instrument in psycho-therapy. In Rabelais' delightful and lovable book, the patient is at first amused, having his senses tickled, then he becomes intrigued and in the end scoops up with the philosophic spoon a tangible, definite foundation and outlook toward the world at large.

The exact dates of Monseigneur Robert de Balsac could not be traced through the ordinary cryptic channels of the penitential searching for references. It is known, however, on the fairly good authority of Allut, that Balsac served as a nobleman warrior *par excellence*, in 1471 under Louis XI, and that, under Charles VIII he was made the high commandant of the citadel of Pisa. It is obvious that his treatise "L'Hôpital" was the common-sense approach, mingled with running wit, of his visitations to the poor unfortunates, soldiers, and diseased who filled the institutions of charity to the brim. The treatise was published by the famous Dr. Symphorien Champier of Lyons in 1503 as a final chapter and addenda to his book "The Cloister of Princes."

The original manuscript no doubt reached Champier through Geoffrey de Balsac (puissant seigneur messire Geoffrey de Balsac seigneur

¹ Original title.

Châtillon de Lyons, le grand varlet du Roy Charles VIII) who, as a relative of Monseigneur Robert, lived in Lyons. Champier, who paced the floors of the Hôtel Dieu, no doubt saw in the manuscript the inherent 'Geist' of many of his patients. The translator in the twentieth century has tried with his too feeble pen to catch the spirit of the original document.

*'The Course by which a Hospital functions, that is, those People of whom it admits, those in particular who reach this Institution in the main by their own Doings. These Persons who enter the Hospital, Their Types, Natures and Deeds, and who finally escape Malice, Misery and Injustice by casting themselves into this Refuge.'*¹

There are people who have little in the way of means, but spend a lot. There are people who play voluntarily at games, but lose a lot. There are those people who have rather moderate means, but spend lavishly and buy costly and expensive things. There are also those poor soldiers who have sadly not acquired anything in their youth and are agreeable but have spent all. There are finally, too, those distorted owls who spend simply without order or reason. There are those lazy ones who in their youth thought themselves working, but were only dreaming. In our hospital, too, and in our society at large, as the hospital is a section of society, there are merchants who buy and sell, both at bargains and at credits. There are those, too, who would like to revenge themselves on everything which is done to them, seeing only evil in things favorable as well as unfavorable. There are those slipshod *caffards* too, who have the singular faculty of spending the money of others, and who, moreover, have the tremendous fault of not spending it on the proper things, either by their imbecility or by their distinct laziness. There are, moreover, people who are entirely governed by the counsel of fools and of malicious beings and even leave their entire affairs in their charge.

There are those dunderheads who do no good essentially, but who entertain others, their fancies and their relatives, in a grand state.

There exist old dried drums of people and town criers. These poor fellows did not work with industry in their youth and as a consequence, in their old age, take abode in the hospital.

There are those people who serve their masters and live entirely at

their expense. Merchants and other tradesmen who lose everything on credit. There are those unfortunate fellows who have lived entirely within the fling of folly and have damaged themselves before thinking. There are those lazybones who are extremely mouldy and lazy so that their thoughts as well as their bodies are old worn-out cisterns. There are those bigots who with their vanity, as the case may be, play away the day and never think of future consequences. Gourmands and stuffy beasts.

There are rogues who think themselves to be the finest of the mon-seigneurs and depend entirely for their existence on this elevated idea of their state without order and, to be sure, without reason.

There are those effeminate people who are not true to their own natures and who are therefore bastards in their trade.

Of those unstable brutes who are fickle in thought, we had better not talk. There are those who retire late to bed and who arise equally as late; all these in the hospital.

There are those kind souls who are only kind in nature, who volunteer to give money for the poor and needy, but who sadly enough have no money to give. There are those strange animals, who call themselves people, who do nothing but pick at each other, at questions and processes and who therefore nourish their bodies, wasting their time, and eventually retire into our hospital. Opinionated gentlemen and incorrigible ones also exist.

Those people who find nothing expensive and who consequently pay the price badly.

Sots who are born and raised in the womb of dance houses and who finally reach the disproportionate view of thinking themselves extremely healthy and wealthy; these too enter our hospital. There are those unfortunate varlets who out of shortness of insight eat their wheat still on the field before it is properly cut. There are those who spend all of their time in active wasting, going all night and all day, accomplishing nothing but the burning of wood and the melting of the candles they really are. These people do not realize the needs of their families, of their masters and, finally, of themselves.

There are those enterprising persons who take on grand and glorious tasks, but who cannot possibly accomplish these, or, in the end do not really know how. Wasters without measure.

There are those people who, when their neighbors cannot see them because they are absent, lurch themselves forward into the tavern to remain there until the neighbors return with the discrimination to pull them out.

The gent, the brisk, the fair who sadly marry because of their love, but have nothing in the way of money for it to sit on.

Fomentors who do nothing but foolish deeds.

Grumbling oafs who are by nature disobedient to their superiors.

There are those heads who are as stubborn as hard nuts and who concede to nothing.

There are those who by lack of courage lose their well-being.

There are those who wish to supply their ladies with grand habiliments, grand triumphs, deeds and gestures which are perhaps in reality only half there. There are those homes in which when the seigneur and his dame have retired to bed, the servants like mice make banquet. There are, moreover, those seigneurs who make banquets only because they are affected.

There are those kind souls who give more to charity than they really have, and therefore have nothing, ending themselves in the hospital. There are those who find extreme joy in causing damage, either through the idea of the good fortunes of war, or the knightly adventures of malinterpreted deeds.

There are those who consider their deeds far superior than they really are.

There are those who force others to pay for things immediately and who seize the unfortunate ones should they not pay. Bastards of society.

There are those who strangely manage to live rather well without anything.

There are those kind masters who repay the good services of their servants and friends more generously than the deed was actually worth.

There are those who waste their body each night before retiring and who think this a most reasonable act.

There are those souls who take, in trade or commerce or as a gift, large sums of money without counting it, and who finally have to account for themselves. There are those who enjoy the pillage and robbery of fine things which do not belong to them.

There are those seeming sancts who without being princesses or seigneurs, wear velvet, show money and flourish vainly. We find many of these in the hospital.

There are those who having many clothes, both in ideas as well as in goods, are undecided what to wear each day and love to dress and undress, button and unbutton, pin and unpin.

There are those villagers who do not think too kindly of their horses and their beasts and consequently treat them unwell. There are those wights who let their tapestries, or murals, or the clothes in their closets rot away. Their bodies like the state of their goods are often seen in the hospital.

Companions, those lovely fellows who get along so well together, plenty of them, are those poor gentlemen who eat expensive things with no money.

There are those who leave their own true and natural work in order to do something which they consider highly superior. Many of these become members of our gendarme force. There are those who travel at the very moment their gardens are in fruit and waste away like the grapes on their vines.

There are churlish bastards who simply let rain fall on their haystacks. There are those old sots who change a good horse for a bad one, turning good money into bad, and finally, reduce everything as well as themselves, which may have some good, into bad.

Those people who engage things without cause or reason also exist in this world.

Tankards who frequent taverns and cabarets and burn green wood.

Those souls who once did good things, worthy of merit, but who finally in the course of years have forgotten how to do them.

There are those who have the kindness to underjudge unessential wrong-doings of either their servants, their neighbors or their neighboring country men, like the good Duke of Brittany, and many others. There are those who destroy the horse's back in order to save the saddle.

There are those who procrastinate their defecation and urination to their own disadvantage. There are those who read without thinking and who finally cannot pass away the time except by superficial pleasures.

There are those persons who leave not only their granaries but their houses unlocked and who finally, in the course of adventure, lose the key. There are those who damage themselves only to give pleasures which are not always beneficial to others.

There are those brothers of the blade who are unsatisfied with truly pleasant things and leave these for the unpleasant ones because of ambitious profit.

There are those people who lose their proper right and are excommunicated.

There are those unfortunates who lose their money for the fear of spending it too quickly, hiding it away. There are those people who have and buy furniture and all manner of things without keeping inventory.

There are those blades who enjoy the pleasing of others without honor or honesty. People exist, strange as it may seem, who are mixed up in too many affairs, all very different.

Persons we find, who have will, but no reason.

There are those who call themselves sages, but who are fools.

There are those who constantly press things upon you, when they are visited; you must ride their horses and wear their clothes. There are, of course, liars in this world. There are those poor fellows who do things so lightly without thinking that they forget that a morrow exists. There are those who think that anything of any good will never tumble onto them; these are unhappy. There are those people who think themselves so superior that the man ceremoniously eats at the head of the table and his lady at the foot of it. There are those who are ungrateful to God and who live badly and always have a bad end. There are those who buy a horse, still unborn, and who forget about it after the seventh day. There are those who serve in large houses, but who wear atrociously large slippers. The noise of these is annoying. There are those who have plenty of goods in lots of places, but who never visit them.

There are those beings who spend a lot with the expectation that some day they will receive a fortune. There are those souls who have a pleasant task and work industriously, but cannot make their living by it and must do something else.

There are those masters who are attended by many servants in all

necessities without ever inquiring whether they serve them well or badly.

There are those persons who sell their lands to lend to others.

In the hospital, we find plenty of poor as well as beggars pretending wants, who wish for lovely clothes, pleasant things, tasty viands, but who are repulsed by the idea of labor.

Some people are curates and tutors of children.

There are public officials who spend the money of others on themselves.

There are people who constantly visit the rich in their homes, so constantly that, when they leave for their own moderate abodes, they have the intense desire to imitate their hosts. There are those people who receive large fortunes and plenty of finance and who spend it without proportion. There are people who give too much to their children for expense and consequently teach them badly. There are people who receive goods and are able of placing them properly. There are people who are ordinarily worthless. There are those persons who depend entirely in their actions on their birthplace and who give this noble gesture a significance which is shallow. There are plenty of persons who reprimand others for their deeds, but who are actually themselves much worse in character. There are those who lose by mistakes and do not profit by their error. There are those who constantly charge things to themselves on a non-existing credit. There are those industrious persons who labor tremendously, but without direction and consequently lose in the end. Husband and wife do not agree, and if in one case the one is bad, the other soon becomes worse. There are often two masters of different and contrary opinions in the same house. There are those young people and others of such a nature that, when their parents and friends tell them and judiciously criticize their faults, they are made worse in so far that they become incorrigible, sad, and useless.

There are persons who never mend or stitch together the damages in their tapestries or clothes. There are also those demurrers who believe and have the ardent faith that their masters will always help them out of difficulties and consequently depend on something which they do not have. The people who spend much, much more than they are really worth, had better die.

There are those strange blades who, after saving diligently for some time, adapt themselves to tremendous ideas of their own, and the subsequent investment is a loss. There are those who cannot execute fortunes. There are those persons who have always the desire of procrastinating their necessities and deeds until tomorrow, and then again tomorrow, and then the next hour,—time goes and nothing is done. There are those strange fellows who go to the market to sell their wares and sell, through the good graces of the customer, things for two or three pieces of money: and then they spend six,—this day is wasted. There are those who apprehend that they are unwell, but who do nothing about their malady until it is too late. There are those persons who to gain a little lose much in money, health and time. There are those noble people who give freely the best wine of the village in large jugs, music, flesh to their friends, to people they hardly know, in fact to anyone who might be pleasant, without realizing what they are doing. There are those who through laziness never have their houses cleaned.

There are vagabonds, churls, huff-capped squires and rogues, stealers of valuable time, who cannot think for themselves and always present themselves inconveniently, who never realize what might happen, the dangers of life, who have no idea of death, these and many others are the principle inmates of the hospital together with those whom I have just named in the preceding parts. These people have not the remotest idea of how to live.

All those who do contrary to a balanced and intelligent state will probably be seen in the hospital. They fall under the order of the poorly governed in character.

